

**The making and breaking of (de-facto) ethnic alliances:  
A constructivist reading of Sinhalese-Muslim relations in Sri Lanka during 1983-2015**

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**民族連携における結合と分離：  
1983 年～ 2015 年におけるシンハラ・ムスリム関係に対する構造主義的分析**

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**要 旨**

スリランカにおける民族間関係は主にタミルといった共通の敵に対抗する上で結合するシンハラ・ムスリム、という謂わば「味方の敵は敵」論に則り理解される傾向にある。そのような結合は共通の敵を失うと分離していく可能性が高い。本稿では 1983 年～ 2015 年にかけてのムスリム・タミル・シンハラの実動に関する経験的データに基づき、民族間関係を分析することにより、シンハラ・ムスリム間の（事実上の）連携は少なくとも紛争期においては固定化されていなかったことを明らかにする。本稿はまた、社会的に構成される多様且つ流動的なエスニック・アイデンティティの一部が状況的必要性に応じて活性化されていることが、民族間連携が固定化されない背景にあることを指摘する。つまり、エスニック・アイデンティティが流動的であるからこそ、民族間連携もまた可変的なのである。

キーワード：民族間関係、イスラムフォビア、シンハラ、ムスリム、シンハラ仏教ナショナリズム、正統派イスラム、暴力、スリランカ、構造主義



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## 1. Introduction

During the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka (1983-2009) Sinhalese and Muslims were assumed to have a de-facto ethnic alliance<sup>1</sup> against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but in the immediate aftermath of the war, they found each other threatening and large-scale Sinhalese-Muslim riots took place. The most commonplace explanation of this ethnic coalition is (built upon a materialist and a rationalist<sup>2</sup> foundation) that the triadic ethnic relations in Sri Lanka resemble a classic balance of power system where the alliance between A and B makes C suffer. In other words, ethnic relations have been interpreted in Sri Lanka in line with famous ‘enemy of my friend is my enemy’ thesis, where Sinhalese and Muslims are friends and Tamils are the common enemy of both. This assumption is not something invented recently but has historical origins. As de Siva clearly states:

[Q]uite often Sinhalese politicians have used state resources to build the Muslims as a counterweight to the Tamil community in a game of checks and balances which is an intrinsic element in the process of government in a plural society....Tamil-Muslim rivalry in Sri Lanka is a political reality, and the Muslims themselves have responded with alacrity to Sinhalese overtures to back them against Tamils (de Silva, 1986: 232-233).

As most commonly assumed, this real or imagined ethnic coalition of Sinhalese and Muslims continued during the war and according to Ali, “...had the LTTE remained undefeated and in control of the north and in parts of the east, Muslims could have continued to win the support and sympathy of the Sinhalese majority governments. The military defeat of the LTTE in 2009, however, and the total annihilation of its leadership has unfortunately deprived Muslim politicians of an important bargaining chip” (Ali, 2014: 306). According to this rationalist explanation, Sinhalese considers Muslims as a “‘good’ minority, implicitly contrasting them with the troublesome and recalcitrant Tamils...” (McGilvray, 2001: 9)

and formed a coalition against Tamils. In other words, it is both Sinhalese' and Muslims' rational choice to form a de-facto alliance against Tamils, which is the most cost-effective alternative. Along with this rationalist explanation comes a subsequent priori that as long as a common enemy (the LTTE/Tamils) is apparent, the relationship between friends (Sinhalese and Muslims) should be constantly cordial. Yet, in reality, was there a de-facto alliance between Sinhalese and Muslims during the war with constantly cordial relations between each other? Does simply the presence of the common enemy (the LTTE) underpin a de-facto alliance between Sinhalese and Muslims?

Answering the above questions, first, this paper analyzes a set of empirical data gathered upon the behaviors of the three ethnicities in Sri Lanka from 1983 up to 2015, and attempts to establish an objectively created structural schema for inter-ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. The structural schema asserts that during the war, the de-facto ethnic alliance between Sinhalese and Muslims has been broken down in an irregular pattern at several occasions. In other words, the relationship between Sinhalese and Muslims has never been constantly cordial during the war and along with that, this paper recognizes the inadequacy of fundamentally rationalist and generic explanations such as 'enemy of my friend is my enemy' or 'alliance between A and B makes C suffer' in explaining complex ethnic dynamics. Secondly, upon a constructivist standpoint, this paper explains the reasons behind the irregular patterns of making and braking of the de-facto ethnic alliance between Sinhalese and Muslims. Ethnicities are not fixed entities constituted upon a single identity. Instead, ethnicities have been socially constructed with multiple constitutive elements and consequently possess a repertoire of multiple identities (meanings). These multiple ethnic identities can be either activated or deactivated depending on various human processes and that affects the nature of inter-ethnic relations. Since ethnic identities are multiple and in constant change, this paper argues that we cannot expect inter-ethnic relations to be fixed (either to be constantly cordial or hostile). By carefully unearthing historical evidence, the latter part of this paper draws parallels between the breakdown of Sinhalese-Muslim alliance and the activation of mutually incompatible identities of the two ethnicities.

## 2. Changes in ethnic identity categories in Sri Lanka: Do those really change?

Sri Lanka is a society that assumes ethnic identities as fixed (since ethnic labels or rather names associated with ethnicities remain unchanged) and consequently inter-ethnic relations are also assumed to be fixed, where Sinhalese-Tamil and Tamil-Muslim relations have been considered historically hostile (Tambiah, 1986:102; McGilvray, 2001:20; MaGilvray, 2008:314) while Sinhalese-Muslim relations have been cordial for decades (Dewaraja, 1994). This assumed fixity of inter-ethnic relations is due to the assumed singularity of ethnic identities of Sinhalese, Muslims, and Tamils. In everyday usage in Sri Lanka, the ethnic identity of both Sinhalese and Tamils is understood as a combination of race and language but not religion (Chandra, 2012: 54), while the ethnic identity of Muslims as a combination of religion and race but not language. Thus, each ethnicity is commonly believed to have a single identity than a range of several identities. If an ethnicity only constitutes of a single identity, there can be no room for change.

Do Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims have only one ethnic identity? For instance, if Sinhalese ethnic identity is a combination of race and language, how do we define the occasional emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist sentiments in Sri Lanka? If Sinhalese ethnicity is a single ethnic identity, why are Sinhalese still conscious about caste divisions among them when it comes to marriage and prefer to get married to the same or an upper caste? If Tamils do have a single ethnic identity,

how do we understand Tamils' consciousness of differences between Jaffna Tamils, Estate Tamils, and Batticaloa Tamils or the severe caste consciousness among Tamils? If Muslims have a single ethnic identity as a result of the combined racial and religious components, why is there a sense of differentiation between the Eastern Muslims and the rest? How can we conceptualize these internal variations within Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims? This compels us to understand the ethnic identity differently, where ethnicity is not one but a combination of many concepts.

## 2.1 A Constructivist reading on ethnic identity change

Individuals have multiple (not single) ethnic identities, these identities are constructed and can change, and such changes, when occur are a result of some human processes (Chandra, 2012: 19). This is the simplest constructivist agreement on ethnic identity. The following section discusses how individuals possess multiple ethnic identities, and why those identities are subjected to change, by bringing out examples from the Sri Lankan context.

### 2.1.1 Ethnicities have multiple (not single) identity categories

In *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*, Kanchan Chandra defines ethnic identities as;

[A] *subset of categories in which descent-based attributes are necessary for membership*. All ethnic categories require descent-based attributes, by this definition, although all descent-based categories are not ethnic categories....But here it is sufficient to note that this subset includes...identity categories based on the race, region, religion, sect, language family, language, dialect, caste, clan, tribe or nationality of one's parents or one's own physical features (Chandra, 2012: 9, emphasis in original).

As per the above definition, ethnicity can be constituted of multiple descent based attributes<sup>3</sup> such as caste, class, clan, religion, region, language, dialect or even one's own physical features. For instance, suppose person X is living in the Southern Province in Sri Lanka, and he/she possesses the following *descent based attributes* such as, a descent from parents born in the southern coast in Sri Lanka, Sinhala language spoken at home, Buddhism practiced regularly and also belongs to the caste of farmers which is locally referred to as *Govigama*. Thus, this person becomes eligible for a repertoire of multiple (not single) *nominal ethnic identity categories*<sup>4</sup> such as Sinhalese, Sinhala-Buddhist, Low-Country Sinhalese, and Sinhalese Buddhist- *Govigama*. A person may be eligible for several *nominal ethnic identity categories* depending on the number of *descent based attributes* he or she possesses (Chandra, 2012: 9-11, 97-100). However, all the nominal ethnic identity categories may not be visibly *activated* all the time in all the domains. For instance, continuing the above example of person X, ethnic identity categories such as 'Sinhalese Buddhist-Govigama' or 'Low-Country Sinhalese' are not necessarily activated at the institutional or political settings in Sri Lanka, yet those might be activated at private domains as in the case of marriage. Thus, according to Chandra's own words, "ethnicity is not one blunt concept but many narrowly defined ones" (Chandra, 2012: 13).

### 2.1.2 Ethnic identities do change (as a result of human processes)

Ethnic identities are social constructs but not biological givens, and thus subject to change. Motivations such as the desire to assimilate, desire to differentiate, desire for higher social status or economic gains, or emotional needs can compel individuals to change their ethnic identity category (Chandra, 2012: 163). Apart from those motivational factors, mechanisms such as war or violence, changes in public policy, patronage politics, political party or electoral systems influence the change in ethnic identities (Chandra, 2012: 163). One example that can be correctly recognized as a change in activated ethnic category is many of the Sinhalese who switch calling themselves ‘Sinhalese’ to calling themselves ‘Sinhala-Buddhist’ (Chandra, 2012: 166). A second example is Sinhalese, who had hitherto called themselves ‘Kandyan’/‘Up-Country’ and ‘Low Country’ (on a regional basis) or classified into a variety of caste subgroups (Tambiah, 1986: 101) have abandoned those regional and caste-based ethnic identities [in politico-economic domains] to unite in an overarching ‘Sinhalese’ identity (Chandra, 2012: 230-232; Horowitz, 1981: 117). Six significant ethnic categories recognized in 1953 (the first census of independent Sri Lanka) have been reduced to four by the time of 1981 (table 1). Yet, quite interestingly, those regional and caste-based Sinhalese ethnic identity categories are still well activated in private domains, as in the case of marriage.

Table 1. Changes in activated ethnic identity categories

Ethnic category	1953 (%)	1981 (%)	Ethnic category
Kandyan Sinhalese	26	74	Sinhalese
Low Country Sinhalese	42		
Ceylon Tamil	11	13	Sri Lanka Tamil
Indian Tamil	12	5	Indian Tamil
Ceylon Moor	6	7	Sri Lanka Moor
Indian Moor*	0.5		
Others	2	1	Others

\* Indian Moors have been considered in the section ‘others’ in 1981.

Source: Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka (2015:129).

Technically, population census has the capacity to introduce “a rule of *selection* that tells us which attributes individuals should pay attention to and eliminate others from the public consciousness” (Chandra, 2012: 154, emphasis in original), or construct and mold collective identities (Kertser and Arel, 2002: 2). From 1981 onward, the population census in Sri Lanka has influenced the weight individuals put on language rather than other attributes such as regional differences when interpreting Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic identities. By contrast in the United States, census puts weight on the skin colour and, in India, much attention is given to the last name (Chandra, 2012: 154). Thus, one way of changing the repertoire of basic descent based attributes is by changing the manner in which those attributes are interpreted and given importance, which will eventually filter down to the community and create the common knowledge that some attributes are important and others are not.

In Sri Lanka, almost all the ethnic groups possess multiple nominal ethnic identities/categories and those are subjected to change. Sinhalese people simultaneously possess several nominal ethnic identity categories such as a cohesive Sinhalese identity<sup>5</sup>, a religious Sinhala-Buddhist identity, Sinhalese-Christian or Sinhalese-Roman Catholic identity, regional identities such as Up Country (Kandyan)-Sinhalese or Low Country-Sinhalese, and also several caste-based identities. This situation is

quite similar to Sri Lankan Tamils. Apart from an overarching Tamil identity based on language and race, Tamil-Hindu identity, Tamil-Christian or Tamil-Roman Catholic identity, regional identities such as Jaffna-Tamils or Estate-Tamils/Indian-Tamils and several caste-based categories are also visible (Tambiah, 1986:104-105). Similarly, Muslims in Sri Lanka have several nominal ethnic categories (McGilvray, 2001:21) such as a cohesive Muslim identity<sup>6</sup> which mostly appears in the form of a religious Islamic identity, region-based Eastern or Western-Muslim identity, Sinhala or Tamil speaking Muslim (based on language) identity and Sri Lankan Moor (Arabic origin) and Indian/Coastal Moor (Indian origin) identity.

These multiple nominal ethnic identity categories have been changed over time; some due to the influence of the state, public policy or war and some due to the personal choice of individuals. For instance, caste and region based identities have rarely been activated for a public or political cause in Sri Lanka, whereas religion and language-based identities have always been politicized and activated in institutionalized politics (elections, party politics, legal systems, constitutional affairs) civil wars, and riots by the three groups. However, the purpose of this paper is not to evaluate to what extent each human process has contributed to the changes in ethnic identity categories, but to emphasize the fact that, since ethnic identities are multiple and mutable, we cannot expect fixed ethnic coalitions/ inter-ethnic relations between ethnic groups.

Having that theoretical understanding of the mutability of ethnic identity categories, this paper proposes a reinterpretation of inter-ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. Rather than superficially interpreting Sinhalese and Muslims were united during the war to defeat the common enemy (the LTTE), this paper argues that, even during the war there were circumstances where Sinhalese and Muslims were quite hostile to each other and that was due to the frequent changes in activated ethnic identity categories of both groups occurred due to various human processes underlying the social fabric of Sri Lanka. The famous ‘enemy of my friend is my enemy’ thesis, as this paper argues, does not reflect the reality of complex ethnic dynamics. Based on this rationalization, two propositions have been posed which will be tested later in this paper.

Proposition I – *Sinhalese-Muslim (de-facto) alliance is possible only if Sinhalese and Tamils are antagonistic toward each other (or ideally in situations where the latter are engaged in a war).*

Proposition II – *Making and breaking of Sinhalese-Muslim de-facto alliance is related to the activation/deactivation of certain constitutive elements of ethnic identities of both Sinhalese and Muslims.*

In order to test the credibility of the above propositions, this paper collects data as mentioned below.

### 3. Data

#### 3.1 Methods of data collection, aggregation, and analysis

##### 3.1.1 Data sources

This study collects a sample of 1352 events<sup>7</sup> (actions/activities) occurred between the three ethnic groups during 1983 and January 2015 for analysis. 1983 is selected since it is a landmark year in the history of Sri Lanka marking the start of the military actions between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). January 2015 has been selected as the end point, since a significant regime change takes place with the presidential election on 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 for the first time after the termination of the war in 2009.

Events considered for this study are, decisions undertaken or verbal and physical actions and reactions of the three groups (Sinhalese, Muslim, and Tamil), performed by the political elite, statesmen, rebels or any other politically significant individuals or leaders affiliated with those groups, directed toward the other, or their external environments. A Few examples from the sample of events are:

1983

1. The LTTE kills 13 soldiers in the north.
2. It sparks racial riots in the country between 24 & 31 July. An estimated 2,000 died. Property initially estimated at US\$150 million damaged or destroyed. Tamils arrested arbitrarily and detained for long periods without trial.

1984

3. Aftermath of 1983- President Jayawardena openly insults Muslim politicians telling them that they could leave the government if they did not agree to his decision to establish an Israeli interest section in the United States Embassy in Colombo.
4. All party conference convened to discuss the framework for a political settlement of Tamils' grievances. Ministry of National Security formed to combat terrorist violence.
5. All Party conference was held and it ended up with heated arguments between Amirthalingam and Ven. Pannaseeha nayaka thero.

1985

6. 1985 April 13 & 14- Tamil militants openly declared war on Muslims and threatened Muslim villages. Started occupying Muslim owned agricultural lands / or an attack on the Tamil village Karaitivu, when Muslim youths apparently with the support of the security forces, went on a rampage, killing several people and burning hundreds of houses.

Majority of the data have been collected from *Minorities at Risk* (MAR) dataset, yet it has some limitations. MAR dataset collects event data from 1990 until December 2006, whereas the period under research in this study is from 1983 until January 2015. MAR project, on the other hand, does not collect data on Muslims in Sri Lanka considering them as a separate ethnic minority. In order to fill these major gaps, other sources such as South Asian Terrorism Portal<sup>8</sup>, chronologies and timelines created by online news sources such as BBC<sup>9</sup>, and secondary sources such as International Crisis Group reports and scholarly records of Sri Lankan history have been used. Relying on multiple sources in this manner reduces the risk of selection bias of events while increasing the accuracy and reliability.

### 3.1.2 Data aggregation

Data aggregation aims to achieve three objectives. First is to understand the actor and the target of events occurred between the three ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. For that purpose, this study categorizes all the events under six dyads as mentioned in table 2.

Table 2. Dyads

<i>Actor - Target</i>	
Sinhala - Muslim	(S→M)
Sinhala - Tamil	(S→T)
Muslim - Sinhala	(M→S)
Muslim - Tamil	(M→T)
Tamil - Muslim	(T→M)
Tamil - Sinhala	(T→S)

Source: Author drawn.



The second objective is to aggregate events upon the ‘positive/negative’ nature of the event. The third objective is to measure the significance (weight) of each event. For that purpose, this study utilizes Goldstein’s new weights for the World Event/Interaction Survey (WEIS) events as the basic coding rule. Data aggregation in this manner is known as weighted event count method<sup>10</sup>. There are 61 different types of events in Goldstein’s new weights (see appendix I) and each event has been weighted assigning different values ranging from -10 to 8.3<sup>11</sup>. Use of WEIS event types and weights serves the second and third intentions mentioned above, by simultaneously categorizing events as positive or negative while assigning each event a particular weight. 61 WEIS events types have been used here, first, because WEIS events types cover many of the possible actions that can be expected from a setting where different ethnic groups are engaged in power relationships. Secondly, WEIS events remain one of the best known and most widely cited in similar studies (Howell, 1983:150).

For the ease of analysis, the above time period of 32 years (1983-2015) have been further divided into four major phases as mentioned below.

Phase I – 1983-1987 (sub-period I)

1988-1992 (sub-period II)

1993-1997 (sub-period III)

1998-2002 until Ceasefire Agreement (sub-period IV)

Phase II – 2002-2005 (from Ceasefire Agreement until the presidential election in late 2005)

Phase III – 2006-2009 May (last phase of war)

Phase IV – 2009 May-2015 January (the aftermath of war until the presidential election in 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2015)

Four main phases are demarcated considering major systemic changes occurred due to incidents such as elections, regime change or temporary halting of war in Sri Lanka. Phase I is specifically further divided into four sub-periods, in order to maintain roughly homogenous time periods. Positive and negative weight ratios for the six dyads under seven time periods have been calculated by using the following formulae.

$$1. \quad PWR_{dyad} = \frac{PW_{dyad}}{TW_{dyad}} \times 100$$

$$2. \quad NWR_{dyad} = \frac{NW_{dyad}}{TW_{dyad}} \times 100$$

In these formulae, PWR stands for Positive Weight Ratio and NWR for Negative Weight Ratio. TW stands for the Total Weight, which is the sum of both positive and negative weights of each dyad. However, each dyad has two weights (one positive and the other negative) reflecting how events unfold naturally between communal groups.

### 3.2. Limitations of data collection, aggregation, and analysis

There are several limitations/weaknesses within the above data collection and aggregation methods. First, data collection was challenging since well-prepared event data sets are not available for domestic activities among identity groups in Sri Lanka, especially starting from 1983. As mentioned above, MAR dataset has some gaps and those have been filled by using several other sources<sup>12</sup>. Combining different data sets together creates some confusion since each has used different data



collection methods. Also, the author does not deny the fact that there is a risk of missing some events for some time periods. Specifically, from 1983 up to 1990, a relatively smaller number of events have been gathered since many of the data sources have not collected events in detail for that period.

Second, in terms of data aggregation, one primary weakness is that there is no inter-coder reliability check in this study. Due to the limited resources, this study does not use multiple coders for inter-coder reliability. Author has coded events personally, and there is a possibility of affective influence. However, that limitation is minimized by using a standard coding rule; 61 WEIS events types and the new weights assigned to those.

Third, results of data analysis totally depend upon the demarcation of time periods, which has been decided solely by the author. Therefore, one can argue that demarcation process is either biased or unjustifiable. In order to limit these possible negative allegations, demarcation of time periods are done considering major systemic changes in Sri Lankan polity, and those systemic changes that have been considered here are well known, major turning points in the recent history of Sri Lanka.

#### 4. Results of the data analysis

Table 3 summarizes a total of 1352 of events (observations) collected for the purpose of this study for seven time periods.

Table 3. Percentage of positive/negative events (un-weighted) for each time period

	1983-1987	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2002-2005	2006-2009	2009-2015	Total
Number of observations	16	30	151	199	137	300	519	1352
Positive %	31.25	20	23.17	23.11	36.49	17.3	40.46	
Negative %	68.75	80	76.82	76.88	63.5	82.66	59.53	

Source: Author drawn.

Table 4 below summarizes the nature of relationships between the three ethnic groups in Sri Lanka from 1983 until 2015. Unlike table 3, here weighted events have been categorized by each time period and dyad. Percentages of positive and negative weights for each dyad under seven time periods have been presented as a ratio.

By looking at table 4, it can be quite easily understood that the relationship between Sinhalese and Muslims is not constantly cordial during the war. During sub-period IV (1998-2002) and also in phase II (the period during the ceasefire agreement), and in phase IV (in the aftermath of the termination of war), the relationship between Sinhalese and Muslims has turned to be an antagonistic encounter. This is one of the major findings of this study, evidencing that ethnicities in Sri Lanka have not behaved and interacted as the generic assumption ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’ predicts. Proposition I (*Sinhalese-Muslim alliance is possible only if Sinhalese and Tamils are antagonistic toward each other or ideally in situations where they are engaged in a war*) has been derived from the conventional wisdom of the ordinary populace in Sri Lanka that Muslims utilized the presence of war and the LTTE as a bargaining chip to win the sympathy of Sinhalese majority governments and vice versa. Yet, according to the data analysis above, this assumption has been proven false. In sub-period IV and also in phase II, while Sinhalese and Tamils are still in an antagonistic encounter, Sinhalese-Muslim relations have also turned to be antagonistic. In other words, having a common enemy has been insufficient in some

circumstances to keep the Sinhalese-Muslim cordiality constant. In order to understand what has caused the deformation of Sinhalese-Muslim de-facto alliance, this paper examines the common features of sub-period IV, phase II and phase IV. With supporting evidence, following section put forward the argument that, in the three time periods above, Sinhala-Buddhist and Muslim ethno-nationalist identity categories have been chosen and activated and that has endangered the ethnic alacrity between the two groups.

Table 4. Nature of ethnic relations overtime (1983-2015) in Sri Lanka

Dyads	Time Periods						
	Phase I (1983-2002)				Phase II (2002-2005)	Phase III (2006-2009)	Phase IV (2009-2015)
	Sub Period I (1983-1987)	Sub Period II (1988-1992)	Sub Period III (1993-1997)	Sub Period IV (1998-2002)			
	P:N	P:N	P:N	P:N	P:N	P:N	P:N
S-T	49:51	67:33	17:83	7:93	16:84	7:93	58:42
T-S	20:80	7:93	7:92	10:90	25:75	5:95	27:73
T-M	39:61	0:100	4:96	22:78	25:75	11:89	100:0
M-T	0:100	0:0	0:100	0:100	29:71	20:80	42:58
S-M	75:25	100:0	62:38	22:78	17:83	63:37	23:77
M-S	73:27	100:0	100:0	0:100	0:100	79:21	33:67

Source: Author drawn

## 5. Discussion: Inter-ethnic relations are in flux due to unfixed, multiple ethnic identities

Having proven that proposition I (*Sinhalese-Muslim alliance is possible only if Sinhalese and Tamils are antagonistic toward each other or ideally in situations where they are engaged in a war*) false above, the question still remains ‘why Sinhalese and Muslim de-facto alliance is negative even with the presence of the Tamil factor, the common enemy?’ Answering that question, this paper finds that making and breaking of ethnic alliances is related to the activation/deactivation of certain constitutive elements of ethnic categories (see proposition II). By looking at the three periods where Sinhalese-Muslim relations are negative (sub-period IV, phase II and phase IV), the discussion below asserts the above postulation.

Towards the end of the mid-1990s (sub-period IV in table 4), there was a high Buddhist revitalization in Sri Lanka (Uyangoda, 2007b) when Reverend Gangodawila Soma (a Buddhist monk) started his public religious career, which was widely termed as Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Bringing it to a climax, a famous television debate between Reverend Soma and M. H. M. Ashraff, then leader of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), in 1999 aroused political debates and public fears among some sections of Sinhalese and Muslims toward each other. Reverend Soma was a severe critique of unrighteous activities of politicians, Christian religious conversion and Muslim politics in Sri Lanka. Particularly, regarding Muslims, his argument was on demographic grounds that by 2025 Sinhalese Buddhists will be a demographic minority in Sri Lanka due to purposely high birthrates among Muslims (Deegalle 2006, 241; Uyangoda, 2007b: 166-170; Ali, 2014: 307). In addition to that, several large-scale Sinhalese-Muslim riots also take place in this period in Nochichiyagama and Mavanalla (McGilvray, 2016: 49-50).

In phase II (during 2002-2005) we could observe a temporary activation of ethno-nationalism<sup>13</sup> among Muslims. This is evident through Muslims' repeated claims on a separate homeland through the 'Oluvil Declaration'<sup>14</sup> in 2003, and by their request on a separate Muslim representative and the idea of a Muslim Self-Governing Region in the Eastern Province in peace negotiations during 2002-2005 (Salman, 2008: 36; McGilvray and Raheem, 2007: 26-28). For instance, Rauff Hakeem, then cabinet minister and the leader of SLMC, signs a separate Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Prabhakaran (Leader of the LTTE) shortly after the inception of Ceasefire Agreement in April 2002 (Uyangoda, 2007a: 30). This temporary ethno-nationalism of Muslims prevents them from maintaining the usual de-facto alliance with Sinhalese during phase II. Activation of ethno-nationalistic characters of Muslims is (arguably) rare during sub-period I, II and III. During those early years of war (1983-1997), neither Muslims requested for a separate autonomous region, nor were the Sinhalese mobilized strongly on a religious cause. In that sense, proposition II (*making and breaking of Sinhalese-Muslim de-facto alliance is related to the activation/deactivation of certain constitutive elements of ethnic identities of Sinhalese and Muslims*) become more authentic and credible than proposition I. Thus, this paper argues that the deformation of Sinhalese-Muslim ethnic alliance is mostly correlated with both activated Sinhala-Buddhist identity and ethno-nationalist characters of Muslims.

As table 4 indicates, in phase IV (post-war period), again the inter-ethnic relations of Sinhalese and Muslims are negative. Continuing the same assertion above, this paper argues that the reason for the breakdown of the de-facto alliance of Sinhalese and Muslims in the aftermath of the termination of war is not necessarily due to the absence of the common enemy – the LTTE, but rather related to the activation of religious elements that constitute both Sinhalese and Muslim identities.

Since 2010 there have been further examples of such violence [violence between Sinhalese and Muslims], but unlike the 1915 and 2001 skirmishes, these cases do not appear to be exclusively economically motivated. Nor are they obviously connected to envy arising from perceived educational inequality, though that could still be an underlying factor. In the most recent cases, the motivation appears to be more explicitly religious in character (Stewart, 2014:244).

As Stewart states above, the activated ethnic identity of both Muslims and Sinhalese have switched and taken a politicized religious dimension in the post-2009 period facilitating the breakdown of Sinhalese-Muslim alliance. Supporting the above proposition, several incidents can be mentioned. The emergence of several Buddhist Nationalist groups, mainly led by Buddhist monks, such as *Bodu Bala Sena*<sup>15</sup> (founded in 2011)<sup>16</sup>, *Sinhala Ravaya*, meaning the voice of Sinhalese people (Stewart, 2014: 246), and *Rawana Balaya*, meaning the Power of King Rawana<sup>17</sup>, causes religiously manufactured fears over minority Muslims. This is followed by the attacks on the Khairya Jumma mosque in Dambulla (Central Province, Sri Lanka) in 2012 claiming that the mosque has been built on a ground sacred to Buddhists (BBC Online, 2012), another attack on a mosque in Grandpass area in Colombo 2013, several mob attacks on famous Muslim clothing warehouses in Pepiliyana and Panadura in Colombo district in 2013 and 2014 respectively (Colombo Gazette, 2013; Colombo Telegraph, 2014). These clashes peaked up in June 2014 with the 'Aluthgama incident' with widespread communal violence among Sinhalese and Muslims in the Southern Sri Lanka, as a result of an altercation between a Buddhist monk and three Muslim youths who are accused of assaulting the monk (Haniffa et al., 2014: 1). In addition to that, a *halāl* abolitionism movement emerged with Sinhalese Buddhists' allegations against *halāl* techniques of slaughtering animals and Muslims' consumption

of cow flesh (Stewart, 2014: 252-253). Attacks on a beef stall in Tangalle and a slaughterhouse in Dematagoda which was alleged of slaughtering calves intending to outlaw the *halāl* certification in Sri Lanka (BBC Online, 2013) are some of the many incidents that took place in post-2009 period in Sri Lanka. When looking at the events unfolding in Sri Lanka in post-2009 period in particular, it is quite ostensible that religious elements of ethnicities have been mobilized than any other identity category available for both Sinhalese and Muslims. This is a part of the identity affirmation process, where both Sinhalese and Muslims are struggling to construct and establish their ethnic solidarity by perceiving each other as threats on religious grounds.

Identity affirmation is partly a conscious process whereby an ethnic group is impelled to display its unity through visible symbols, and overt symbolic action....The psychological function of identity affirmation is to enhance a group's low self esteem...when there is an actual or perceived threat to the unity of the group, so that the ethnic group must affirm its collective solidarity and maintain its self-image (Obeyesekere, 1997: 377).

In summary, it is not either the absence or presence of Tamil factor that decides the nature of Sinhalese - Muslim alliance. For instance in sub-period IV and phase II even with the presence of the common enemy – the LTTE – Sinhalese-Muslim relationship is negative. Activation of Sinhala-Buddhist religious identity, Muslim ethno-nationalism and the salience of extreme forms of religious identities of both Sinhalese and Muslims respectively in the three periods 1998-2002, 2002-2005 and 2009-2015 appear more reasonable explanations of the breakdown of Sinhalese-Muslim alliance rather than generalizing it upon either the presence or the absence of the Tamil factor. In other words, sustenance of a de-facto alliance (specifically during a period of civil war) cannot be essentially guaranteed upon the presence of a common enemy. In the case of Sri Lanka neither shared language nor shared enemy make Sinhalese and Muslims eternal friends. Instead, these two ethnicities constitute multiple identity categories and some of those become salient in certain occasions and the relations between groups vary accordingly. However, this paper does not narrowly hold the position that religious-nationalism of Sinhalese or ethno-nationalism of Muslims have been suddenly emerged only in occasions where their inter-ethnic relations have been fallen down. Rather, what this paper argues is, ethnic groups possess a repertoire of identities, from which they choose to practice only some in certain circumstances. As a result of prioritizing certain categories over others the inter-ethnic relations fluctuate either positively or negatively.

For instance, Muslims have been developing a religion based ethnic identity from 1970s onward (Ali, 2014: 308). Islamic orthodoxy has been emerging in Sri Lanka after the 1970s with the influence of two Islamic movements; *Tabligh Jamaat* (TJ) and Wahabism. Mushrooming of mosques and *madrasas*, the calls to prayers over loudspeakers, changing attire of Muslims in Sri Lanka, and also the availability of financial assistance for mosques and Islamic cultural associations from countries like Saudi Arabia (Ali, 2001: 8; Ali, 2014: 310-311) were seen in post-1970s Sri Lanka as a result of growing Islamic orthodoxy. Similarly, religious nationalism of Sinhalese-Buddhists is also not a phenomenon newly invented, but has historical roots. Starting during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Buddhist revivalist movement led by Anagarika Dharmapala, and later by Walpola Rahula (Grant, 2009: 45-68; Schalk, 2006: 91), it lasts even during the time of the war where many Buddhist monks advocate war “couching their justifications in religious rhetoric, to stop inimical forces from dividing the Island or from corrupting Buddhism in Sri Lanka” (Bartholomeusz, 2001: 147-148).

Yet, neither the growth of Islamic orthodoxy in post-1970s nor the very existence of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist identity in political domains has necessarily caused antipathy between Sinhalese and Muslims. Neither has it prevented positive relations between the two during 1983-1997 (sub-period I, II and III) and 2006-2009 (phase III). Only when religion or ethno-nationalism based ethnic identity categories of both Sinhalese and Muslims are activated and politicized the ethnic alliance begins to break down. Thus, this paper finds that the reason behind the irregular patterns of making and breaking of ethnic alliances correlate with the nature of the activated identity category out of the repertoire of categories possessed by an ethnicity. This is the same argument that some other scholars have put forward in different terms. For instance, Kenneth D. Bush states “‘Identity’ *does not mobilize individuals* (as primordialist proponents would argue), rather *individuals mobilize identity*...” (Bush, 2003: 6, emphasis in original). Wilkinson also brings forward a similar assertion that ethnic antagonism or riots are not an outcome of already high degrees of polarization and competition but as the means through which political entrepreneurs construct solid ethnic categories for purposes (Wilkinson, 2012: 361). What is inferred here is that neither Muslim, nor Sinhalese and Tamil (or any other) ethnic identity is singular and fixed. Instead, identities of ethnic groups are plural and social constructs. One ethnic group has a repertoire of nominal ethnic identity categories and those multiple ethnic categories can be activated or deactivated, revised or reinvented. The nature of inter-ethnic relations are finally fashioned by this process of activation and deactivation of multiple identity categories attached to ethnicities.

## 6. Conclusions

The main intention of conducting the above empirical analysis was to find out answers to the question, ‘does the making and breaking of (de-facto) ethnic alliance between Sinhalese and Muslims is solely dependent upon the presence or absence of the LTTE/Tamil factor?’ The most commonsensical answer is that the presence of a common enemy (the LTTE) stimulates Sinhalese and Muslims to be allied with each other and it is quite realistic to expect the breakdown of the alliance in the post-2009 period since the common enemy is no longer alive. Yet, one main contribution of this study is the substantial challenge posed on above generic and speculative ‘enemy of my enemy is my friend’ thesis. As per the findings of this study, even with the presence of the LTTE, Muslims and Sinhalese do not necessarily ally with each other at certain circumstances. Sinhalese-Muslim alliance is formed and deformed in an irregular pattern, at unexpected situations during 1983 up to 2015, which this paper explains through a constructivist understanding of ethnic identity. What this paper argues is that an ethnicity constitutes of plural identities and making and breaking of ethnic alliances/ inter-ethnic relations is related to the activation/ deactivation of certain identities out of the repertoire. In other words, both Sinhalese and Muslims have activated different ethnic identities during 1983 up to 2015 and the changes in the nature of inter-ethnic relations are related to the very process of activation/deactivation of ethnic identity categories. Mostly, in the case of Sinhalese and Muslims, activation of religious and ethno-nationalistic elements of ethnicity has resulted in inter-group antagonism.

## Notes

- 1 There has been no formal or treaty-based alliance between Sinhalese and Muslims in Sri Lanka against the LTTE. Yet, many scholars (as cited in the text) and the ordinary populace assume that there was an informal or unspoken alliance between Sinhalese and Muslims during the war. On that basis, this paper uses the terms ‘de-facto alliance’, ‘ethnic coalition’, ‘informal alliance’ or simply ‘alliance’ interchangeably to refer to the cordial relations between Sinhalese and Muslims.
- 2 ‘Materialist’ and ‘rationalist’ worldviews consider that ethnic groups (states or individuals) are rational actors seeking individual advantage. Inter-ethnic relations, in that sense, are fashioned by the power and material needs of each ethnicity and also upon calculation of costs and benefits of inter-ethnic relations, but not upon the socially constructed meanings attached to each ethnicity (Wimmer, 2008; 971).
- 3 Here, Chandra’s statement that descent-based attributes are required for ethnic identity formation is seemingly incompatible with the constructivist position that ethnic identities are not biological givens. Yet, Chandra also explains how her argument on ‘descent’ differs from the primordial understanding that ethnic identities are biological givens (Chandra, 2012: 149-150).
- 4 This paper interchangeably uses both terms ‘ethnic identity category’ and ‘ethnic identity’ with the same meaning. By ethnic identity category or simply ethnic identity, this paper means the combinations of attributes. For instance ‘African-American’, ‘Sinhala-Buddhist’, ‘Indian/Estate Tamil’ or ‘Eastern-Muslim’ are ethnic identities/ identity categories whereas Buddhism, Sinhala or Tamil languages are simply ethnic attributes.
- 5 By a ‘cohesive Sinhalese’ identity, the author means an all-encompassing Sinhalese identity irrespective of its regional, religious or caste based divisions.
- 6 By a ‘cohesive Muslim’ identity, the author means an all-encompassing Muslim identity that sometimes emerges uniting all the regional, descent and language-based divisions among Muslims.
- 7 All events data collected are available from the author upon request.
- 8 See South Asian Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/> (consulted June 2016).
- 9 See BBC ‘Sri Lanka Profile’, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12004081> (consulted June 2016).
- 10 The rationale behind weighted event count method is to categorize events not simply under positive-negative or cooperation-conflict categories for example, but assigning a value to each event considering that some events are more powerful than others.
- 11 The method Goldstein utilized to weight events has not been explained in this section. For a detailed description of the manner he weighted 61 WEIS events see - Goldstein, 1992: 371-377.
- 12 Other well-known databases such as *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* also gathers conflict data for Sri Lanka in the form of an annual summary and records number of deaths and state, non-state and one-sided violence (but does not record non-violent and cooperative activities occurred between the three ethnicities chronologically as required by this study. Therefore, it was not utilized in this study).
- 13 Ethno-nationalists have political leaders who claim that they are entitled to their own nation-state and should not be ruled by others. These groups, short of having a nation-state, may be said to have more substantial characteristics in common with nations than with urban minorities or indigenous groups. According to the common terminology, they are ‘nations without a state’ (Eriksen 1993, 13-14).
- 14 Oluvil Declaration takes place at the Eastern University of Sri Lanka in 2003. It asserts traditional homeland, self-determination and autonomy for Muslims in Sri Lanka (Bandarage, 2009: 185).
- 15 The meaning of the Sinhala name *Bodu Bala Sena*, can be directly translated to English as ‘Buddhist Power Force’ (Jayasekera, 2013) or ‘Buddhist Strength Army’ (Stewart, 2014). This monk group has been considered as a form of religious nationalism, Buddhist revivalism, Buddhist exclusivism, militant Buddhism or a clerical fascist organization. However, many of these interpretations are highly arguable.
- 16 The official Facebook page of *Bodu Bala Sena* states its year of foundation as 2011. See- Bodu Bala Sena, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/OfficialBoduBalaSena/about/> (consulted June 2017).
- 17 Author has translated the literal meaning of the Sinhala name *Rawana Balaya* into English as ‘the power of King Rawana.’

## Appendix I

## Goldstein weights for WEIS events

Event type	Weight
1. Military attack; clash; assault	-10.0
2. Seize positions or possessions	-9.2
3. Nonmilitary destruction/injury	-8.7
4. Noninjury destructive action	-8.3
5. Armed force mobilization, exercise, display; military buildup	-7.6
6. Break diplomatic relations	-7.0
7. Threat with force specified	-7.0
8. Ultimatum; threat with negative sanction and time limit	-6.9
9. Threat with specific negative nonmilitary sanction	-5.8
10. Reduce or cut off aid or assistance; act to punish/deprive	-5.6
11. Nonmilitary demonstration, walk out on	-5.2
12. Order person or personnel out of country	-5.0
13. Expel organization or group	-4.9
14. Issue order or command, insist, demand compliance	-4.9
15. Threat without specific negative sanction stated	-4.4
16. Detain or arrest person(s)	-4.4
17. Reduce routine international activity; recall officials	-4.1
18. Refuse; oppose; refuse to allow	-4.0
19. Turn down proposal; reject protest, demand, threat	-4.0
20. Halt negotiation	-3.8
21. Denounce; denigrate; abuse	-3.4
22. Give warning	-3.0
23. Issue formal complaint or protest	-2.4
24. Charge; criticize; blame; disapprove	-2.2
25. Cancel or postpone planned event	-2.2
26. Make complaint (not formal)	-1.9
27. Grant asylum	-1.1
28. Deny an attributed policy, action, role or position	-1.1
29. Deny an accusation	-0.9
30. Comment on situation	-0.2
31. Urge or suggest action or policy	-0.1
32. Explicit deadline to comment	-0.1
33. Request action; call for	-0.1
34. Explain or state policy; state future position	0.0
35. Ask for future information	0.1
36. Surrender, yield to order, submit to arrest	0.6
37. Yield position; retreat; evacuate	0.6
38. Meet with; send note	1.0
39. Entreat; plead; appeal to; beg	1.2
40. Offer proposal	1.5
41. Express regret; apologize	1.8
42. Visit; go to	1.9
43. Release and/or return persons or property	1.9
44. Admit wrongdoing; apologize; retract statement	2.0
45. Give state invitation	2.5
46. Assure; reassure	2.8
47. Receive visit; host	2.8
48. Suspend sanctions; end punishments; call truce	2.9
49. Agree to future action or procedure, to meet or to negotiate	3.0
50. Ask for policy assistance	3.4



51.	Ask for material assistance	3.4
52.	Praise, hail, applaud, extend condolences	3.4
53.	Endorse other's policy or positions; give verbal support	3.6
54.	Promise other future support	4.5
55.	Promise own policy support	4.5
56.	Promise material support	5.2
57.	Grant privilege; diplomatic recognition; de facto relations	5.4
58.	Give other assistance	6.5
59.	Mark substantive agreement	6.5
60.	Extend economic aid; give, buy, sell, loan, borrow	7.4
61.	Extend military assistance	8.3

Source: see Goldstein (1992: 376).

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